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A WORD TO THE UNLUCKY NURSE ¹

By JOSEPHINE HILL, R.N.,

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It is not to the experienced and successful nurses that I wish to speak, but to those who have been, as they term it, "unlucky." Of course your own good luck depends on yourself, inasmuch as you make yourself acceptable to your patients. Any one can be successful with some people, but it is harder to win a victory over ourselves and also over circumstances, to make a success of a case when the patient is one of the impossible kind. A cranky, nervous, peevish patient may tire out many nurses until one comes that has hold of the philosophy of life and meets all onslaughts of irritability with a calm composure, a mixture of sympathy and firmness that conquers the patient.

I think self-consciousness is the handicap of most new nurses. It narrows life down to the viewpoint of the nurse only, the woman in her has been submerged under the professional training of the nurse. If we just remember that we are *women* first of all, to help, to think, to plan, to sympathize, to advise, it makes our work much broader, and the fact that we have been trained to care for the sick, is an additional adjunct to the make-up, but it is not everything.

Some of the best nurses I know are disagreeable women. Some of the best nurses, in one sense, do not use common-sense. A happy medium is what constitutes the successful nurse. Some nurses are overburdened with conscientiousness to do as they are told by the doctor, or to live up to their ward training. These nurses are not a success, because they lack adaptability. They lack a general knowledge of human nature, they lack a feeling of sympathy from the standpoint of the patient. Hysterical sympathy, or obtrusive sympathy, we know is not good for the patient, but you must be *in sympathy* with your patient. You must let the patient feel that you are her friend, that you are doing what you would for one of your own family; empty words and empty sympathy are soon detected and mistrusted by a patient. Imagine yourself sick and think how you would like your nurse to treat you,—that makes a great difference. Eliminate the idea of "patient and nurse" from your mind and take the broader attitude of two human beings,—one sick, uncomfortable, and unhappy; the other (you), well, kind, and attentive.

¹ Read at the Special Session of Private Duty Nurses, Chicago, June 6, 1912.

I think kindness and adaptability two of the most important characteristics of a successful nurse. An interested attention is necessary, but not a *busy-body* attention. Do not weary your patient with useless, fussy treatments just to be busy; do what is necessary for comfort, and then be peaceful and let the patient have peace. They enjoy rest of body and mind when sick.

I have heard patients say, speaking of their illness and nurse: "She was too attentive and never let me rest day or night." We know that in some diseases, such as typhoid, the patient must have a routine of attention, but there can be perfectly restful times even in that illness. If you have been ill yourself, you will know exactly how little things can make or destroy your comfort.

Besides a good hospital training, have kindness, common-sense, adaptability, and above all, be always a broad-minded, refined, cultured, dignified woman, and you will find that your work will be a pleasure to you. You will be a great help to those around you, whether sick or well. A woman has great power, even if she is a professional nurse, but her power lies, not so much in her hospital training, as it does in her own mental and soul development.

ON TALKING SHOP

THE school-teacher (not the tea-kettle this time) began it. It was during training-school days. We were seated at the dining-room table. A night nurse, looking fresh from her day's sleep, entered, and, hardly seated, started the conversation with, "Anything new to-day?"

"How's old man Riley?" she continued. "Did that woman in ward C 'go out' this morning? Any 'ops'? Did Dr. Stevens aspirate? That 'pn.' developed 'd.t.s,' didn't he?"

One question after another was fired at us who had been keeping the pace on day duty and were patiently awaiting 8 P.M.

And one night at dinner was exactly like another until the school-teacher rebelled and in her sweet, low voice repeated that "Walrus and Carpenter" verse from the delightful classic, "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland."

When the school-teacher speaks, one listens, so there was never any interruption when we heard: